

Spending the Day with God sermon series
#3 – Talking the Walk
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Kory Wilcoxson

I want to read this one line from Peter again, because as we move into our conversation today it's at the heart of what we are called to do as Christians. Peter says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have." Another translation says, "Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you are living the way you are."

Wait a second, Peter. I have no problems doing my best to live a Christian life, but to speak up and talk about it? That thought can make us squirm a little. It's one thing to walk the walk of the Christian life, but to talk the talk? That conjures up images of street-corner preachers and slick-haired TV evangelists. And that's not us.

Yet, as we move into our day, we are called to take who we are and live that out to the fullest. Last week, when we talked about spending the morning with God, I mentioned that we can use the stillness of the morning to ground ourselves in the understanding that we are first and foremost a child of God, who created us and the day ahead of us. So on days when we are able to start this way, and even on the days when we don't, we are called to move into the day living as sons and daughters – children – of God.

One of the titles Jesus uses for himself in the gospels is "Son of Man." If we move past the gender bias inherent there we learn that the title "son of" means "the essence of." Its modern equivalent is "chip off the old block." In other words, Jesus is the essence of humanity, the embodiment of the best qualities of humanity. So to use another title for Jesus - Son of God - says that Jesus represented the essence of God during his time on earth. So what am I saying when I say that we are called to move into our day as "sons and daughters of God?"

Are we prepared to take on that kind of responsibility? It sounds kind of heavy. "Go forth and be the essence of God in this world." I'm just lucky if my socks match. And yet, God calls us to be witnesses to what we have seen and heard and experienced, to live out what we have been trained to do.

Wait! What training? You mean you didn't hear about the weekly seminar on how to live out your faith? This time IS the training. In his book "Testimony," Tom Long says, "Worship is the language school of life, where we learn the vocabulary to talk about God." In other words, we learn on Sunday what to say on Monday, things like "forgiveness" and "peace" and "grace" and "hospitality."

Sunday is not just one more day in a string of days. Its relationship to the other days is not just chronological. It is the day that makes all the other days make sense and we carry what we learn here into each day. We are called to worship as people who have real lives and to live as people who worship.

Does that mean we have to significantly change how we go about our days? Should we start wearing white robes or pepper our conversations with a lot of "Hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord!" Go ahead if you want but you may not find a lot of people who want to talk to you. I don't believe we are being called to do anything differently than what we do now in our lives. The Christian life is just an ordinary way of

life – eating, conversing, running errands, cooking, relating – refracted through the lens of the power of Christ in our lives.

That doesn't mean our mouths should drool with Jesus talk. I'm a firm believer that Jesus' name is taken in vain all the time by people trying to push an agenda or a gospel of wealth or an all-expenses-paid guilt trip. Brian McLaren argues that based on the state of Christianity in our country today, he wonders if Jesus would be a Christian. What is missing in this world is not God talk – we have plenty of that. What is missing is authentic God talk. There are a lot of falsities out there about who Jesus is and how God works in our lives. What is most often missing is one simple thing: the truth, as we have experienced it in our own lives.

If we are going to tell the truth about our lives, God has to be part of the conversation, because we simply would not be where we are right now if not for God. God didn't bring us to this point in our lives so we could hide our light under a basket. But telling the truth puts us in a bind. How do we talk about Jesus without sounding like we're Bible-thumping crazies? Sometimes we feel like comedian Flip Wilson, who said, "I'm a Jehovah's Bystander. They wanted me to be a Jehovah's Witness, but I didn't want to get involved."

As we move into our day, we ARE called to get involved, to get involved in God's work in this world, to be another pair of hands and feet that work to sow the seeds of the kingdom of God. That doesn't mean we have to wear our religion on our sleeves. Instead, we're called to weave it into the very fabric of our everyday garments.

That can be quite a challenge. Sometimes the commands of Jesus and the demands of life are in conflict with each other. Do we stand up for what we believe is right or sit down to save our reputation? Do we speak up for those who don't have a voice or stay quiet for fear of being silenced? Do we dare say, "I believe" and risk being given a cross to bear? When the Bible says, "Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you are living the way you are," it assumes we are living our days the way we have been called to live. If we choose to walk a walk that doesn't tell the truth about what we believe, then Jesus Christ isn't our Lord, he's just our Mascot.

Maybe what scares us about fully claiming our faith is that we don't know for sure if we've got it right or not. How do we know for certain, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that what we believe is true? Enough good people die every day to disprove every word we say here on Sunday morning. I'm a lot more reluctant to tell someone else about my beliefs if I'm not so sure about them myself.

We are not called to convert anyone. That's God's job. We're not even called to prove anything, because we don't have any proof. All we have is our testimony, our story. As we live through our day, through the words we use and the choices we make we are called to simply say, "Here's what I have experienced. I am not claiming that it is perfect or enough or even very good, but I believe that it has led me to a very good thing."

Those are simple words but they have the power to transform our world. When we worship, when we speak to God and listen to God speak to us, we are armed with an incredibly powerful weapon that has always been seen as a threat in our world. The early Christians didn't worship in underground catacombs because they liked the cool air. They were hiding because the Roman authorities recognized the transformative power of the words they were speaking.

Isn't our world in need of those kinds of words? So many words are spoken each day that wound, tear down, and devastate. Words have such destructive power. But the opposite is also true. Remember, God *said*, "Let there be light." Words have the power to create, to heal, to illuminate, to give hope. These are the words of truth we are called to speak, words mixed in with the cups of coffee we share with a friend or the coupons we share with the grocery clerk or the smile we share with our neighbors. A healing word. A hopeful word.

Peter says we have to be prepared to share these words, because if we walk the walk, people are going to take notice. People are going to see that we have something they don't. Tom Long says, "The world is full of stories searching for the One True Story that helps all other stories make sense, the story of a God who loves us." We've heard that story. We love that story. And we are called to tell that story with our actions and our words.

We hear a lot of words every Sunday. Some of them have a deep meaning for us, some of them are more difficult for us to understand. Can any of us fully grasp the meaning of communion or forgiveness or love? I know I can't. But I do know one word that, when spoken to me, changed everything about my life. I didn't understand the word when I first heard it. In fact, I'm not sure I completely understand it now. It's that kind of word. But I know that people who've heard the word have been changed. And I know there are so many more people out there who desperately need to hear this word. It's just one word. You can speak it with your mouth or with your arms or with your heart. No matter how you speak it, it needs to be spoken.

The word is "Jesus."